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**Testimony of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition  
For the Appropriations Committee  
March 3, 2015  
In Opposition of Proposed Cuts to Early Childhood Education re:  
Proposed FY 2016-2017 Biennial Budget**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Porter, Representative Genga, and other distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) opposes the cuts to early childhood education as listed in the Governor's Proposed FY 2016-2017 Biennial Budget.

If a young child receives quality care and early childhood education, the benefits last a lifetime. The experiences a child has in their first five years of life can have a lasting impact on later success and ensuring that our youngest children have access to high quality early care and education services is paramount. Early childhood and education (ECE) programs are a benefit to both children and families as well. In order to work and support their families, parents need affordable, safe, and nurturing places for their children to go. Nearly three quarters of young children in Connecticut have full time working parents or guardians. Without access to early care programs, hundreds of thousands of parents would be unable to work, weakening the state's economy and depriving their families of needed income. While all children benefit from participation in quality early care and education programs, these services are particularly essential for children at greater educational risk (including those families in poverty, families headed by a single parent, families with limited English proficiency, and parents with less than a high school diploma). Preschool attendance is one of the most important factors contributing to kindergarten readiness, and can make the greatest difference for at-risk and low-income children. Connecticut has some of the largest K-12 achievement gaps in the nation for African American, Hispanic, and low-income children. Research shows that these achievement gaps are already present at kindergarten entry. Connecticut has an urgent need for quality early education programs to help more disadvantaged children enter school on track and ready to learn.

Although the Governor's budget proposal for FY 16 and FY 17 shows a continued strong commitment to ensuring that all children have access to ECE, it does not demonstrate an equally healthy commitment to ensuring that all ECE settings are of the highest quality and can address the comprehensive needs of children and their families.

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Studies show that the multiple long-term benefits gained by early care and education are only apprehended if programs are of high-quality. In particular, the budget proposal decreases funding for wraparound services and Parent Universities, all programs that recognize the need for a two-generation, holistic approach to early education. Ensuring affordable, accessible, high-quality before and after-school care is another two-generation strategy that benefits children and their parents. These comprehensive approaches should be embraced and expanded, not depleted.

As Connecticut moves forward in bettering our children and families' futures, access to programs should not be the only goal. Investing in quality services, supports, and ECE for children and their families is how we can ensure that all of Connecticut's children succeed in school and beyond. Thank you for your time and consideration.